

Testimony on Bill C-10 to the Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, February 15, 2012

Witnesses Representing the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse

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Opening Remarks

Good evening. The Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA) welcomes the opportunity to appear before the Senate Committee on Bill C-10. CCSA is an arms-length, not-for-profit organization governed by a volunteer Board of Directors. CCSA was created by an Act of Parliament in 1988 that established our mandate to provide national leadership, evidence-informed analysis and advice; and to advance solutions that address alcohol- and other drug-related harms.

Respecting this mandate, as well as the areas of interest identified by the Committee in its invitation to appear, the content of the proposed legislation, and the questions raised during the Committee's hearings on this matter to date, we will provide a brief overview of the evidence base in three areas:

1. Effective approaches to substance use;
2. Drug treatment courts; and
3. Prevention of substance use among youth.

Effective approaches to substance use

The Committee has previously heard concerns regarding the impact of Bill C-10 on the provinces and territories in terms of incarceration. The treatment alternatives provided by Bill C-10 will also rely on services provided at the provincial and territorial level.

The report *A Systems Approach to Substance Use in Canada: Recommendations for a National Treatment Strategy* has been distributed to the Committee. This report identifies gaps in the current treatment system, including resources, coordination, and measurement and monitoring. It also outlines the development of a comprehensive continuum of services and supports to address these gaps.

Canadians with substance use problems face many barriers to accessing treatment. Barriers such as complex needs and stigma are increased for clients involved with the criminal justice system.

Drug treatment courts

As the Committee has heard, drug treatment courts have been implemented throughout the United States and in some Canadian urban centres with varying indicators of success. CCSA encourages the implementation and evaluation of innovative approaches to addressing substance use. However, we would like to highlight the following concerns regarding drug treatment courts:

- They are not available to most Canadians involved with the criminal justice system;
- They do not have a strong evidence base for diverse populations such as women, First Nations and Inuit; and
- They require the use of very expensive court resources.

Clause 43 (2) of this bill is intended to ensure that offenders who require substance use treatment are able to access appropriate services. CCSA believes that it is crucial that we measure, from the outset, the impact that implementation of Bill C-10 will have on treatment services and on the rates of access to treatment or other diversion options for offenders with substance use problems. We suggest that this impact be monitored within the first year of implementation and reported on regularly thereafter to inform any required policy change. CCSA would be pleased to offer our support in conducting such an impact assessment and in exploring diversion options.

Finally, I am pleased to introduce my colleague Heather Clark, who will briefly highlight best practices in preventing substance use among youth.

Preventing substance use among youth

Several witnesses have noted that one of Bill C-10's goals is to prevent substance use among youth. The evidence base indicates that health and social interventions such as building skills and competencies in parents and youth, improving family relationships, engaging youth with pro-social influences such as the school and community, and ensuring a good match between programs and youth characteristics can significantly affect substance use and other health and behaviour outcomes, both in the short and long term. These types of interventions have also demonstrated to be cost effective. Alternately, punitive approaches such as drug testing and zero-tolerance policies are not supported.

Currently, there are significant gaps in youth substance use prevention in Canada. CCSA supports aligning policies and consistent funding with evidence-based initiatives to address the gaps, and has recently published the Portfolio of Canadian Standards as a resource to support this alignment.

In closing, CCSA would like to recognize the support that the federal government has provided for both prevention and treatment through the Drug Treatment Funding Program and Community Initiatives Fund components of the National Anti-Drug Strategy. We hope that any legislation addressing substance use through criminal justice and enforcement aspects will be supported by continuing, evidence-informed investments in other sectors—particularly health and social services—that contribute to a comprehensive approach.